Distr.
GENERAL

A/CONF.172/10/Add.3
26 April 1994

Original: ENGLISH

Item 10 (g) of the provisional agenda*

NATURAL DISASTER REDUCTION: DROUGHT MANAGEMENT

Technical session

Addendum

Managing drought: preparedness, response and drought-proofing strategies

Summary of presentation by the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations

1. Drought cannot be avoided but its impact on human lives and property, as well as its consequences on national economies, can be reduced. Generally, time is available to take necessary action to avoid drought becoming a disaster.

2. The short-term impact of drought on human livelihood depends essentially on the efficiency and timeliness of relief response, which in turn will be increased by early prediction of droughts and well-planned response mechanisms. In the long run, the challenge is to devise management strategies and supporting policies that can reduce the physical, biological, economic and social impacts of drought and can enhance food security on a sustainable basis.

3. There are several tools for anticipating drought, including weather forecasting, modelling soil moisture levels and remote sensing. Advances in satellite and communication technologies enable early warning systems to provide more reliable monitoring of vegetative cover and hence impending food

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* A/CONF.172/1.

GE.94-01775 (E)

crisis. Agrometeorological and satellite-based data for monitoring food crop conditions and drought detection are extensively used by the Global Information and Early Warning System of the Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO). Its principal objectives are to monitor continuously food supply and demand conditions, identify countries or regions where food shortages are imminent and assess possible emergency food requirements. Substantial progress has also been made in establishing national early warning systems in about 40 developing countries. Early warning that is not well integrated with decision-making and response mechanisms will not, however, achieve its objectives. This requires well considered response options at the leadership's disposal, as well as the financial and material means to do the things that need to be done.

4. The aims of disaster preparedness are to minimize the adverse effects of a hazard through effective precautionary measures and to ensure timely, appropriate and efficient organization and delivery of emergency response following the impact of a disaster. In the absence of national preparedness plans, remedial measures are likely to be delayed, and the costs to be incurred in terms of human life and loss of material and livestock could be considerable. Thus, the cost of rehabilitation would also be higher. National preparedness measures should form an integral part of long-term food security programmes and local participation in their design, implementation and evaluation is essential.

5. The major objectives of mitigation efforts are not only to abate the impact of the current emergency but also to shorten the period of recovery and, in the long term, to reduce vulnerability to future food emergencies. More specific input to food production and range resource management require, for full effectiveness, prior action in policy areas, such as pricing and marketing policies and land tenure. The highest priority should be given to input that arrest land degradation and improve food security. Where crop technology can help, it is most likely through water conservation, drought-resistant crop varieties and better on-farm storage. Widespread soil erosion and declining soil fertility are further constraints to improving productivity. Overgrazing is a widespread constraint to the sustainable development of drylands, requiring input to improve animal husbandry, livestock off-take and the integration of grazing control with water development. In the drylands, demand for fuelwood is increasing and supply is rapidly diminishing, with many areas having already reached a deficit situation. Forestry can play an important role in the control of soil erosion, ameliorating the environment, contributing feed for livestock and supplementing the diet of the rural population. Diversification is the key to food and livelihood strategies in drought-prone, degraded areas.